CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED AND TWENTIETH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva
on Tuesday, 23 March 1996, at 10.15 a.m.

President: Mr. Nguyen Quy Binh (Viet Nam)

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The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 820th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

I should like at the outset to extend, on behalf of all of us, a warm welcome to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland, His Excellency Mr. Bronisław Geremek, who will be addressing the Conference today. Professor Geremek needs no introduction. His academic record is well known to all of us; it encompasses the holding of a very high position in the Polish Academy of Sciences and the prestigious post of Visiting Professor at the Collège de France in Paris. We are also aware of his deep involvement in the public life of his country and his contribution to the emergence and evolution of the democratic process in Poland. I am sure that we are all appreciative of this further demonstration of the high importance attached by his Government to our forum, and of their continued commitment to the multilateral approach to disarmament.

I now invite the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland, His Excellency Mr. Bronisław Geremek, to address the Conference.

Mr. GEREMEK (Poland): Mr. President, please accept my sincere congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. I wish you every success in the discharge of your important and demanding mandate.

The Polish delegation is also appreciative of the dedication and skill with which your predecessors performed their duties during their respective tenures at the current session of the CD.

I should like to take this opportunity to greet the Secretary-General of the CD, Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, and his deputy, Mr. Abdelkader Bensmail.

Let me finally express to you, Mr. President, my sincere thanks for the generous words of welcome which you addressed to me on behalf of the Conference.

As Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland and a former "dissident", I deem it a great honour, indeed, to be able to make an address to the Conference on Disarmament. As a historian, I am under the spell of this august Salle du Conseil. Over much of the twentieth century it has been witness to some of the major events of international relations - including in the realm of disarmament - which have shaped the fates of nations.

My presence among you today reflects above all the cardinal importance which my Government attaches to disarmament - an integral part of international security. Poland has always actively participated in the multilateral disarmament efforts pursued by the Conference on Disarmament. This is particularly true of the period since the end of the cold war and the collapse of the bipolar world.

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National security concerns are, of course, country-specific and may differ when looked at from an individual or a more aggregate perspective. As for Poland, it finds itself - for the first time in modern history - in a secure and friendly environment. Very recently, Poland, together with the Czech Republic and Hungary, has joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the alliance which has contributed most to global stability since the Second World War. Its significance for Europe and beyond cannot be overstated. But can we draw a lesson from this unique, historical experience of our country? Of course we can. The lesson is that we have to work with determination in all forums, including the CD, to make security a common commodity, assured in equal measure to all members of the international community.

I wish to share with you some general thoughts on international security, its nature and contents. International security is becoming these days an increasingly comprehensive notion. The sense of security for all evermore depends on how successful governments are in upholding common values, in combating organized crime, illicit trafficking of drugs and terrorism, in preventing abuses of human rights, intolerance, famine or other natural disasters. More often than not, security starts in the region and at home: the predominating conflicts are conflicts bred by abuse of power, a deficit of democracy, economic and ecological deficiencies, ethnic intolerance, poverty and ideological or other extremisms.

International security is indivisible. Seemingly faraway conflicts or other threats to security, unless effectively pre-empted or contained in time, are bound to spread to our doors with all their incalculable consequences. The recent history of the conflicts on the OSCE perimeter, especially those ravaging the Balkans and the Caucasus, serves as a sufficient illustration.

The indivisibility of security is true not only in the regional, European context. It has a global dimension as well. Consequently, a reliable security environment is not conceivable either in Europe or in any other region unless due account is taken of that broader factor. It makes, therefore, little sense to speak in terms of a "rich man's" or a "poor man's" war. Indeed, there is no fire-proof wall to isolate a prosperous North from a destitute and frustrated South. We need to contribute in a more effective way in order to promote self-sustainable mechanisms of resolving local conflicts that afflict many parts of the world, including the developing world. In this respect, international solidarity and cooperation for security are the key requirements. Peace can neither be imposed from the outside nor can security be assured and externally monitored. Instead, international solidarity and cooperative security are called for. Both need to be readily available in conflict-prone regions if the nations concerned are to be able to resolve their problems by themselves.

I strongly believe that international security is no longer a zero-sum game. One cannot procure reliable security for oneself at the expense of others. Solidarity and cooperative security mean more transparency, hence a

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better knowledge of one's neighbours. These two terms also imply greater sensitivity to the perceptions and concerns of others. More than anything else, they also mean an increased readiness to go halfway to meeting such concerns.

In the past, international security was a domain largely monopolized by diplomats and general staffs. Fortunately, not any more. Nowadays, as you are well aware, non-State actors - the citizens themselves - have become increasingly outspoken in that respect. It stands to reason, therefore, that henceforth international security will be built more and more around the concept of international civil society in which, along with governments, international organizations, economic and financial institutions, an ever more prominent role will be played by citizens and their spokesmen - the non-governmental organizations. The reason is clear - security today is inextricably linked to and identified with such shared values as democracy, prosperity, personal freedom, respect for human rights, the market economy and the rule of law.

As European history bears out, shared values constitute the most solid and reliable fabric of security and stability. The enlargement of the Atlantic Alliance demonstrates telling approval by its new members for such a concept of security.

It goes without saying that multilateral disarmament efforts, especially those on which the attention of the Conference on Disarmament has been focused, play a critical role in regard to the global security environment. Poland attaches special significance to the two remarkable accords which the CD has elaborated recently - the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty. Poland took a constructive part in their negotiation, as indeed it has in the negotiation of other multilateral instruments produced by the CD, including the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

Certainly, one may strongly and quite legitimately regret that, due to conflicting positions on issues of substance or procedure, many "windows of opportunity" have been missed. However, I would have difficulty in questioning the enduring relevance of the CD because it is "not delivering". The CD is the sole multilateral disarmament negotiating body - not an assembly line for the mass production of multilateral accords. It has negotiated important accords and its achievements over the years have invariably met with praise. We are prepared to concede - like certain other CD members - that some "redeeming value" is inherent even in ostensibly idle deliberations. Dialogue in itself has value as a vehicle with which to identify common denominators, areas of mutual interest and common positions ultimately resulting in agreements. We need a constructive dialogue in the CD as a framework for results-oriented endeavours on most important disarmament issues.

At the very least, dialogue helps keep the negotiating expertise of the CD intact and available for the moment when the political will of CD members

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makes consensus possible. Through dialogue we bring into this hall something very essential - vision. We have to have vision, if we are to look beyond the horizon and if we are to meet the expectations of today and - in particular - of tomorrow.

This certainly is the case with the most complex issue on the Conference's agenda - the issue of nuclear disarmament. I should like to be very clear: it is not my Government's position that the CD should be involved in nuclear disarmament negotiations sensu stricto, that is to say negotiate, for example, specific nuclear weapons reductions. We believe, however, that the CD is mandated to contribute to a climate conducive to the success of bilateral disarmament talks, those ongoing or those to come. In the name of equal and indivisible security for all, we have all subscribed to the idea of a world free of nuclear arms as the ultimate goal. At the same time we need a sense of responsibility when approaching the issue of nuclear disarmament. The bilateral negotiations under way have their own dynamics. They are complex, delicate and vulnerable. Who can assert that one step in a new direction - even if made with goodwill - will not derail the whole exercise?

The nuclear disarmament debate in the CD has not only produced specific proposals but, more importantly in my view, has led to interesting insights into this complex issue. It has also confirmed that conflicting perceptions in this regard are strongly entrenched. As far as my country is concerned, one thing is beyond any reasonable doubt: the dispute over the appropriateness, or otherwise, of a multilateral approach to nuclear disarmament ought to give way to sustained and effective measures to consolidate the non-proliferation regime. Recent events in South Asia suggest that regional nuclear arms may get out of control unless the international community acts in its enlightened interest.

Like many other CD members, Poland supports the unilateral and bilateral commitments which the United States, the Russian Federation, France and the United Kingdom have made with regard to nuclear arms reductions. We are strongly hopeful that the Russian Duma will soon ratify START II and that, as a result, START III will commence, as envisaged at the Helsinki summit of 1997.

The tortured history of negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT) in particular ought to lead, at long last, to a serious and productive negotiating process. The threats inherent in the continued production of fissile materials, or the very real danger of the pilfering of existing stocks by terrorist groups, are too grave to justify intransigence and inactivity. My country finds merit in the view that potential for compromise and progress would be more realistic in negotiating first the future production of fissile material. A timely agreement reached in that regard would certainly create a climate conducive to the positive subsequent consideration of the more complex issue of existing stocks.

In Poland's view, no time should be lost and no avenue should be left unexplored in order to start in earnest a constructive FMCT negotiating process. While its immediate result would have a critically important

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non-proliferation effect, in the long run this might be tantamount to a practical step towards nuclear disarmament and the eventual elimination of nuclear arms.

Poland believes that in an era of a technology - like that in outer space - which develops by leaps and bounds, it may be appropriate for the Conference on Disarmament to allocate time for the continued exploratory consideration of the issues involved. Certainly, the "weaponization" of outer space could pose serious threats to international security and to the peaceful exploitation of that environment. Yet we need to take into due account the assertions that no arms race is under way in space. In our view, great care must be taken not to interfere with or to get confused by the myriad or vitally important uses to which space technology is put these days, starting with communications, meteorology and monitoring functions with respect to environment protection, natural disaster early warning, peace-keeping and disarmament compliance verification.

Poland could, therefore, support the proposition that an appropriate mechanism of in-depth consultations be agreed with a view to identifying the precise positions of States and changes of a practical and realistic nature commanding consensus support.

Poland welcomes with great satisfaction the entry into force, on 1 March, of the Ottawa Convention on a total ban on anti-personnel mines. It is a remarkable testimony to human solidarity. Supported by over 130 Governments, including my own, it is a manifestation of rare humanitarian concern over and compassion for the thousands of unsuspecting civilians, mostly children and women, who are victims of the "killing fields". Moved by the human and material cost of the worldwide landmine crisis, the world's highest moral authorities, including His Holiness Pope John Paul II, have urged a halt to the carnage.

At the same time, we cannot neglect the other side of the anti-personnel landmines problem, that is, its security aspect. For Poland, with its particular geostrategic situation, it is important that all countries in the region join the Ottawa Convention. We hope that all Poland's neighbours will ratify the Convention.

We know that Poland is not alone with such concerns. Seeking to meet those concerns, a group of States, including Poland, have consistently sought to associate the major producers and exporters with the goals of the Convention. These States feel that measures more tangible than appeals are called for. In their opinion, a global ban on transfers of anti-personnel landmines, one that would take due account of the security concerns of States, would be a fitting theme for the Conference on Disarmament.

Negotiated with the participation of, and supported by, the major producers, exporters and users of anti-personnel mines, a transfer ban would be a meaningful arms control instrument. It would also have the advantage of denying explosive devices to non-government forces and terrorist groups for use in internal conflicts.

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We remain convinced that such an accord is still worth pursuing by the Conference on Disarmament.

I believe that the principle of the indivisibility of security applies also to the ultimate responsibility of the international community for the modalities of security. That includes disarmament negotiations and is relevant to the plea for expansion of the membership of the Conference on Disarmament. It has been Poland's view all along that no barriers, even the least subjective ones, should hold back those applicants who, with patience and determination, have been demonstrating their desire and ability to make a tangible contribution to the work of the Conference on Disarmament.

I should like to conclude by restating the importance which Poland attaches to the Conference on Disarmament as the principal, indeed sole, multilateral disarmament negotiating body of the international community. Its potential has not been totally exploited nor its mandate exhausted. My country is determined to continue making a constructive contribution to the work of the Conference.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland for his important statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. That concludes my list of speakers for today. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor?

This concludes our business for today. The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Thursday, 25 March 1999, at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 10.40 a.m.